

BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE

2021/22 SEASON REPORT

The 2021/22 season marked Berkeley Rep's return to in-person performances. After twenty months of dark houses, we were overjoyed to welcome artists, audiences, and students back into our venues for a season of meaningful artistic work. Though this season has not been without its own unique set of challenges — including canceled performances; rescheduled productions; and increased measures to keep our artists, staff, and audiences safe — we have been encouraged by the steady rise in our attendance numbers and our community's enthusiastic response to the programming on our stages. The Theatre finished the season with over 108,000 tickets booked for 2021/22 productions (about 70% of the number sold during our pre-pandemic 2018/19 season), and the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre served close to 3,500 youth and adults with arts education programming.

The 2021/22 season was also one of significant transition, with Susie Medak, Berkeley Rep's Managing Director of 32 years, retiring at the close of the season. Under Susie's leadership and with the support of a deeply committed audience, philanthropic community, and Board of Trustees, Berkeley Rep has established itself as a strong and resilient company. In July, the Theatre was pleased to announce Tom Parrish as Berkeley Rep's next Managing Director.

2021/22 SEASON

Berkeley Rep opened the 2021/22 season in November 2021 with Charles L. Mee's spirited comedy *Wintertime* directed by former Berkeley Rep associate artistic director and long-time artistic collaborator Les Waters. A celebration of bold theatricality and a wildly funny voyage through the lively, poetic, and sometimes messy trials of the human heart, *Wintertime* marked Berkeley Rep's return to live performance 20 months after COVID-19 shuttered its venues.

In January, we were thrilled to present the world premiere of *Swept Away*, which brought together the immense talents of Tony Award-winning director Michael Mayer, Tony and Academy Award-winning stage and screenwriter John Logan, choreographer David Neumann and featured the music of The Avett Brothers with arrangements and orchestrations by Chris Miller and Brian Usifer. *Swept Away* was originally scheduled to close Berkeley Rep's 2019/20 season until the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered theatres around the world. Since that time, the play's themes of survival, redemption, fellowship, loss, and grace only became more salient for audiences who have had to navigate the risks and sacrifices of trying to survive in the midst of a pandemic and the isolation of months spent sheltering in place. Despite painstaking mitigation efforts, including the careful diligence of our cast and crew, we were faced with the realities that come with putting on a play during a pandemic. Early in the show's run, after an ensemble member had a COVID-19 exposure, the rest of the ensemble performed masked for several performances, including opening night. Shortly after, we had to cancel 12 performances due to confirmed COVID-19 cases among the *Swept Away* company. The remainder of the run proceeded without any major setbacks, and we were able to extend the production for an additional week to make up for the lost performances. The show was a hit with audiences. Theatregoers travelled from across the country and from as far as the U.K. and Australia to see the performance. We hosted many repeat attendees — with at least one patron telling our front of house staff that they had seen the show nine times. Also in January, we hosted two special events in the Roda Theatre, *Mike Birbiglia: The Old Man and The Pool* and a series of conversations with social commentator Fran Lebowitz.

In April, three-time Tony Award nominee Dave Malloy captivated audiences with his award winning off-Broadway hit *Octet* directed by Annie Tieppe. With witty lyrics, shimmering harmonies, and virtuosic solos, *Octet* sang of connection, redemption, hope — and how we can be truly present with each other. *Octet* explored the intersections of technology, mental health, and spirituality, as the play's characters seek nourishment, fulfillment, community, and connection online, in a 21st century, post-religious world, which felt especially timely to many audience members who had just experienced the profound isolation of sheltering in place and connecting with others primarily through technology.

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When the tour planned for *Cambodian Rock Band* (scheduled to start June 2022) dissolved, we quickly negotiated a contract to replace the production with Lucas Hnath's Tony Award-winning play *Dana H.*, a true-life story about Lucas' mother Dana, a counselor in a psychiatric ward who was kidnapped by one of the patients and held captive in a series of Florida motel rooms for five months. Audiences in the Roda Theatre were treated to a virtuoso performance by Jordan Baker who brought Dana to life onstage by lip syncing to recordings from interviews with the real-life Dana and by embodying her every aural gesture — like the flick of a braceleted wrist or the crack of a joint — with meticulous precision. Following *Dana H.* was the west coast premiere of Pulitzer Prize winner Martyna Majok's play *Sanctuary City*. Under the direction of director David Mendizábal, the play's three-person cast brought audiences a powerful story of two young DREAMers fighting to establish a place for themselves in America.

August brought the long-awaited opening of the world premiere musical *Goddess*, conceived and directed by Saheem Ali, with book Jocelyn Bioh, music and lyrics by Michael Thurber, with additional lyrics by Mkhululi Z. Mabija, and choreography from Darrell Grand Moultrie. The play was due to open in the Roda in March 2022, but, for the safety of our artists, we rescheduled its world premiere since the large cast, band, and creative team would have had to convene for rehearsals during the height of the Omicron surge. We are deeply proud to have successfully launched a Broadway-scale musical with a core creative team of early career artists of color who had never done a musical before. After the challenges of the last few years, *Goddess* was exactly the kind of joyous and exuberant spectacle audiences craved; it played to packed houses throughout its triumphal run.

Closing out the 2021/22 season was the world premiere of Christina Anderson's *the ripple, the wave that carried me home* directed by Jackson Gay. Originally slated to open Berkeley Rep's 2021/22 season in October 2021, *the ripple, the wave that carried me home* was rescheduled to September 2022 in response to increased COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant. This Berkeley Rep commission was developed in The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work and was co-produced with the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. The play told a poignant, transporting, and quietly subversive story of racial justice, political legacy, and family forgiveness as it explored a family's response to injustice and a daughter's reckoning with her political inheritance.

Throughout the 2021/22 season, we made recordings of all but one subscription season show (the playwright denied permission) and made them available for 7-play subscribers and Northern California classrooms to view if they were unable or unwilling to attend the performance in person. In 2021/22, 3,666 subscribers chose this option, leading to an additional estimated 43,992 digital audience members. One subscriber shared in a post-performance survey: "I like having the option to watch all the plays online. The pandemic isn't over, and I'm more comfortable minimizing my risk of exposure even though I'm vaccinated because risks remain." While our online audiences appreciate having performance recordings as a pandemic alternative, most are eager to be back in the theatre enjoying live performance as soon as they feel it is safe.

SCHOOL OF THEATRE

In spite of challenges brought on by COVID-19, the School of Theatre has continued to provide comprehensive arts learning opportunities, serving close to 3,500 Bay Area children, teens, and adults in 2021/22. During the school year, the School of Theatre offered a diverse array of 1-15-hour in-class residencies for elementary, middle, and high school students in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties. These residencies engaged close to 700 students in 35 classrooms, 10% of which were in Title-I schools, with close to 1,000 contact hours of curricula such as Story Builders, Change Makers, Stage Combat, Improvisation, and Playwriting.

We had intended to bring back our in-person student matinee program in spring 2022 but were unable to do so due to the emergence of new variants and spikes in COVID-19, so we used the hiatus from our in-person program to continue exploring how the Theatre can use technology to extend our reach and impact and help to overcome access barriers including cost, language, geography, and more. We worked to identify urban and rural communities that are underserved in terms of exposure to professional theatre and theatre arts instruction and developed a virtual student matinee program that we will pilot in the coming year. We sought feedback from 250 students in four Bay Area classrooms that received access to high-quality recordings of our spring 2022 productions of *Swept Away* and *Octet* (students in our summer camps also were given access) and a virtual study guide with hyperlinks to additional content. After the pandemic caused many highly trained arts educators to leave the field, we began conversations with theatre faculty at Chico State University, Sacramento State University, and UC Davis about our

creating a program to train and employ their students as a paid corps of teaching artists able to provide in-person pre- and post-show visits to schools and classrooms in remote Northern California locations.

We continue to rebuild Berkeley Rep's Teen Council and refine opportunities for arts learning and engagement that emerged during the pandemic. The theme selected by the Teen Core Council for the 2021/22 podcast series was "Staging Change." In spring 2022, Teen Council members attended workshops on interviewing and sound recording and editing with Berkeley Rep staff members and Fellows. Core Council members then recorded three episodes featuring interviews with local artists: "Margo Hall & Visions for our Community," "Mina Morita & The Sovereignty of Story," and "Eugenie Chan & Storytelling to Survive and Thrive." For the second annual High School Film Festival, the theme of which was "Transformation," close to 100 students (and a few adults) worked as artists and crew on the 18 submitted films, which we screened in June, via Zoom, for a jury of Core Council and 50 audience members. The three winning films have collectively garnered over 1,000 views to date. After offering scaled back Teen Nights for *Swept Away* and *Octet* we were pleased to bring together 100 young audience members from 13 schools for the *Goddess* Teen Night. Teens enjoyed a lively interview with director Saheem Ali and playwright Jocelyn Bioh before attending the world premiere musical. Our final Teen Night of the 2021/22 season, for *the ripple, the wave that carried me home*, also sold out. We are encouraged by the steady rise in our Teen Night attendance numbers and are optimistic that we will continue to see increased participation in our Teen programming in the 2022/23 season.

After having paused our prestigious Next Generation Fellowship Program in spring 2020, Berkeley Rep was thrilled to welcome 13 early-career professionals considering a career in the arts to the 2021/22 Fellowship class. Uniquely, the Fellows were brought on in January 2022 for an six-month program (as opposed to the 11-month program typically offered) and then were offered a one-month extension of their contracts in order to complete the production projects and educational experiences of the 2021/22 season. Fellows were mentored and trained in their respective departments as well as across disciplines, participated in monthly education meetings with department heads, engaged with community partnership learning opportunities, observed two virtual board meetings, and received specialized resume and interview training in preparation for the arts job market post-Fellowship. Fellows also received a monthly stipend of \$1,000, and free housing. These benefits have been essential to helping candidates from a variety of economic, cultural, and identity backgrounds participate. The Next Generation Fellowship Program also has been a key part of Berkeley Rep's strategy to diversify its workforce and sector—typically, 20% of Berkeley Rep's work force is composed of former Fellows, and former Fellows serve in leadership positions at arts organizations around the country.

IN DIALOGUE

Throughout the 2021/22 season, we continued the development of In Dialogue, a new initiative for community-engaged theatre that places Berkeley Rep's theatre-making skills and resources in service of our community through deep, institutional partnerships. Guided by a focus on social justice and a practice of engaged listening, our goal is to create a department equal in scope and ambition to our other major programs that reimagines and innovates what it means for an art institution to engage with its community.

Early in the 2021/22 season, we engaged Social Sector Solutions – The Center for Social Sector Leadership at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business to help us determine the characteristics of good anchor partners for this project and to identify resources the Theatre can activate in service of our partner organizations' missions and goals. Social Sector Solutions began by investigating Berkeley Rep's identity, attributes, values, priorities, and resources, identifying key social justice issues facing East Bay communities, mapping organizational resources, and studying other partnership models before interviewing potential partners to evaluate program alignment and whether Berkeley Rep's resources were suited to helping advance their goals. From those interviews, Social Sector Solutions recommended a list of organizations with whom we plan to begin conversations in 2022/23.

In 2021/22, we began piloting storytelling collaborations with local service organizations, as well as educating and activating our audiences around organizations whose work aligns with the themes of our mainstage productions. In the fall, we created a Giving Grove in the Narsai David Courtyard during our production of *Wintertime*; partner organizations [Berkeley Food & Housing Project](#), [Berkeley Food Network](#), [East Bay Sanctuary Covenant](#), [Girls Inc.](#), [Oasis Legal Services](#), [RYSE Center](#), and [Women's Daytime Drop-in Center](#) each decorated a tree with giving opportunities and wishes that audience members were invited to support and fulfill with gifts.

As we began to explore possibilities for expanded collaborations, we deepened our relationship with the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, by helping to lead their volunteers through the creation of We Are Sanctuary, a presentation of oral history stories from refugees, faith leaders, and community organizers from the early sanctuary movement. Berkeley Rep also teamed up with East Bay Sanctuary Covenant alongside Oasis Legal Services and [Youth UnMuted](#) to activate audiences around Berkeley Rep's production of *Sanctuary City* by installing the exhibit "Into the Light: Stories and Lived Experiences of Immigration" in the Peet's Theatre lobby that commemorated the 40th anniversary of the sanctuary movement in Berkeley and Oakland with oral histories and artwork. Partners from East Bay Sanctuary Covenant also met with *Sanctuary City* cast and creative team to answer the artists' questions and share insights from East Bay Sanctuary Covenant's work as part of the sanctuary movement.

For our production of *Goddess*, we entered into a collaboration with the [Museum of the African Diaspora \(MoAD\)](#) to engage audiences more deeply in the cultural and artistic roots of the production. MoAD docent Clara Kamunde (who has also served as a Berkeley Rep teaching artist) hosted two moderated dialogues: the first was an intimate dialogue on arts, myth, and Kenyan culture with *Goddess'* Kenyan-born director Saheem Ali and the second featured a conversation with *Goddess* cast members on arts, creativity, world cultures, and women (Goddesses) who are changing the world.

Other show specific partnerships included the [Afro-Urban Society](#) animating our courtyard with visual art, spoken word, music, and group dance at two engagement nights during the runs of *Goddess* and *the ripple, the wave that carried me home*; a community board of partner organization and community flyers as part of the lobby experience for our production of *Octet*; and a lobby instillation during *the ripple, the wave that carried me home* on the social history of swimming pools in American by Habithèque alongside features on four organizations promoting inclusion in swimming and access to water and water safety: [Diversity in Aquatics](#), [SPLASHForward](#), Black Swimming Organization, and [Black Kids Swim](#).

We collaborated with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust as cultural consultants on the development of a mural for our new Medak Center building in downtown Berkeley that honors and values the aesthetic traditions of the Ohlone people (more on the Medak Center below). As part of a selection committee including Berkeley Rep staff and two project managers experienced in art installations and mural commissions, Sogorea Te' helped identify and select a muralist who would properly represent the cultural values and sensitivities of our local indigenous community. CeCe Carpio is an internationally renowned artist whose work centers on stories of ancestry, resilience, and social change. CeCe was selected both for her immense talent and her commitment to storytelling through community contribution and listening. We were thrilled to unveil her finished work in November 2022.

THE GROUND FLOOR

In 2022, we celebrate the Ground Floor's 10th anniversary. In 2012, The Ground Floor was launched with a goal of enhancing and expanding the processes by which Berkeley Rep makes theatre by offering artists flexible, customized support for innovative art-making. The program began as a bold experiment with seed funding from the James Irvine Foundation, ArtPlace, and the Mellon Foundation, and over the last decade, it has become part of the fabric of the Theatre's artistic operating ethos.

Our 2021/22 season featured three world premiere productions, including Ground Floor commission *the ripple, the wave that carried me home*. *ripple* playwright Christina Anderson participated in two Ground Floor Summer Residency Labs over the course of developing the piece: first by herself in 2017 where she conceived and researched the idea for the play, and then with director Jackson Gay and a group of actors in the summer of 2018 to do early developmental work, including a public reading.

After cancellations in 2020 and scaled-back activities in 2021, the Residency Lab is back at full scale in 2022. After moving *Goddess* performances into August, in order to accommodate the large number of artists visiting our campuses for the production and our artistic department's available bandwidth, we needed to shift the 2022 Ground Floor Residency Lab from its usual summer slot into the fall. We received over 300 applications for the 2022 Residency Lab. From this group, we invited 23 lead artists to convene at our Harrison Street campus in October to work on 20 projects. Projects range from solo performances and intimate family dramas to explorations of capitalism, aging, and long-haul trucking. The Lab brought together emerging talents and acclaimed artists of the likes of Julia Cho, Beth Henley, and Bassem Youssef to live and work in community, experiment creatively, form unexpected partnerships, and make art in a flexible, supportive environment.

The 2022 Residency Lab was the last for The Ground Floor's Director Madeleine Oldham, who will be leaving Berkeley Rep in December. Under Madeleine, who has led The Ground Floor since its inception, the program flourished to become one of the one of the most well-regarded new play development programs in the country because of its flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of artists.

The challenges of the pandemic awakened us to a heightened awareness of our value as an incubator of new work and a resource for artists and our greater community. Since the start of the pandemic, three major new play development programs (the Lark, the Sundance Institute Theatre Lab, and the Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville) have either disbanded or been placed on indefinite hold. As an institution on a stable footing, we feel an increased obligation and renewed commitment to ensure that compelling new voices from a diverse array of backgrounds, artistic perspectives, and lived experiences have the institutional support they need to develop enduring new work for the American Theatre canon. As the Ground Floor enters its second decade, we plan to build on its past success and continue to create and share new work of the highest artistic quality and nurture our artistic community for years to come.

THE MEDAK CENTER

We completed construction on The Medak Center, a new seven-story, LEED Gold-certified building adjacent to our theatres and School of Theatre in downtown Berkeley that opened its doors in September 2022. The building contains 45 apartment units for visiting artists and fellows, classroom space, workshop and storage space for productions teams, an enclosed loading dock, and a studio space for School of Theatre performances and for The Ground Floor to showcase readings, workshop presentations, and other early-stage work that would benefit from exposure to an audience. By giving The Ground Floor a public presence alongside our other venues, we hope to raise the profile of the artists and works being developed and build a community of new-play advocates from among our audiences who feel invested in the trajectory of projects as they move through our pipeline.

In the midst of the skyrocketing cost of housing in the Bay Area, the Medak Center will allow the Theatre to control our housing costs, as well as potentially rent vacant units at a discounted rate to fellow nonprofit entities on a limited basis.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, & ANTIRACISM

As we work toward rebuilding our attendance numbers back to the 200,000+ served pre-pandemic, we aim to cultivate an audience that is reflective of the vibrant and diverse region we serve. In order to support and sustain the type of audience development and growth we hope to achieve, we are working towards implementing an EDIA practice that fosters a radically inclusive environment for everyone we welcome into our spaces. This work will happen at all levels of the organization, through our offering ongoing EDIA trainings for our staff; ensuring productions' creative teams are as diverse as the stories they help bring to our stages; and continuing to forge connections to new communities and organizational partners through In Dialogue.

Ongoing conversations among our Board and our staff about the Theatre's role and responsibility as a resource to the community have foregrounded the importance of expanding the Theatre's relationship to our community through deep, non-transactional partnerships. Engaging new audiences will require an increased level of dedicated outreach, sensitivity, and flexibility as we test varying methods of attracting and retaining communities new to Berkeley Rep. As we look to re-grow our audience, we also are working to renew engagement with our existing audience base, including those who have not returned since the onset of the pandemic. We are keenly aware that the challenges of enticing people out of their homes and into the theatre are more formidable than ever. In 2020/21 we appointed a new Associate Managing Director who, in collaboration with a newly hired Associate Artistic Director, will lead the development of In Dialogue. Guided by a focus on social justice and a practice of engaged listening, our goal is to create a department equal in scope and ambition to our other major programs that reimagines and innovates what it means for an art institution to engage with its community. Berkeley Rep also has convened advisory councils of community leaders from advocacy groups, foundations, corporations, and local businesses to help us identify gaps in our knowledge, connect with field experts and dramaturgical resources, identify new sources of funding, and reach new audiences.

In 2020, we created the position of Director of Human Resources and Diversity to help align our institutional policies to our EDIA commitments. Under her guidance, we have already taken steps toward diversifying our workforce and

have begun conducting an EDIA training with the cast and creative team of each new production during their first rehearsal day. Working with the Board/Staff Antiracism committee that launched in June 2020 and continues to meet monthly, the Director of Human Resources and Diversity leads our internal antiracism work, referencing and updating our Action and Accountability Roadmap while continuing to center the ongoing regional and national conversations. A portion of every board meeting now is committed to EDI work and training, and the organization now makes an annual payment of \$10,000 to the Shuumi Land Tax. The changes to our hiring and onboarding procedures that we shared last year have seen impressive early results. We are proud to report that since 2020, BIPOC representation on the senior leadership team has shifted from 10% to 40%. Over the same period, the minimum pay rate for entry-level positions (hourly, overhire) has increased by 40% and a land acknowledgement developed in partnership with Sogorea Te' now opens every company meeting and events.

This work is, of course, ongoing. Short-term plans for the future include tactics to diversify our vendor network and to support the candidacy of Board members who would increase overall diversity, and an ever-evolving Accountability Roadmap will guide long-term goals. We are confident that Berkeley Rep's new Managing Director Tom Parrish's decades-long work in arts administration, which has been guided by a deep commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and to breaking down barriers between arts organizations and communities, will help Berkeley Rep expand the community of theatregoers who consider Berkeley Rep their artistic home.

RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit theatre and the performing arts hard: our sector likely will experience some of the most severe and longest lasting effects of any industry. Shrewd institutional planning coupled with governmental pandemic relief and generous Resilience Campaign support from individual donors, allowed us to reopen the Theatre on a relatively strong financial footing with an FY22 operating budget that was comparable to our pre-pandemic budgets. Due to the ongoing unpredictability of public health conditions and changes in purchasing habits, earned income now is less than 40% of our overall budget, as opposed to more than 60% in FY19, which has made the Theatre more than ever reliant on generous philanthropic individuals and organizations. This support allowed us to invest in measures to maintain operations, including hiring additional Actors' Equity Association member understudies, regular COVID testing for casts and crews, dedicated COVID-19 monitors, additional cleaning and sanitizing of our buildings, and developing a streaming option for subscribers. It also helped us weather increased costs due to inflation and supply chain issues. Though the scope of our ambitions has not changed, we are working with fewer resources, including reduced staff numbers. While we made employment offers to all furloughed employees and have begun rebuilding departments, we lost years of institutional knowledge from specialized and long-tenured staff as individuals left the area or the industry or took permanent employment elsewhere.

We have had to adapt to changes in audience behavior. National surveys of arts patrons have shown that San Francisco Bay Area audiences have been slower to return to in-person theatre than audiences in other regions. We saw this reflected in surveys of our returning audiences, with many patrons expressing appreciation for our continued safety measures and some stating that they only felt safe attending knowing that the safety guidelines were in place. School of Theatre staff also reported feedback from students that safety protocols (especially masks and COVID testing) contributed to many adult students' comfort in returning to in-person classes. Ticket buyers' attention has been difficult to capture. We have experimented with adjusting marketing timelines and contact methods; previously successful contact methods, like direct mail, are providing diminishing returns. Our experiments with flexible ticketing packages yielded mixed results.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Tom Parrish began his tenure as Berkeley Rep's new Managing Director in September 2022. Tom has served as a theatre leader and arts administrator for over 20 years, with experience in organizations ranging from multi-venue performing arts centers to major, Tony Award-winning theatre companies. Prior to Berkeley Rep, he served as Executive Director of Trinity Repertory Company, Geva Theatre Center, and Merrimack Repertory Theatre and as Associate Managing Director/General Manager of San Diego Repertory Theatre. Berkeley Rep worked with Arts Consulting Group (ACG), a search firm with a diverse leadership team and clearly articulated commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and antiracism, on the search for the Theatre's new managing Director. ACG was instrumental in helping Berkeley Rep's search committee select Tom from a diverse pool of more than 60 applicants.

Tom will share leadership of Berkeley Rep with artistic director Johanna Pfaelzer, who states, "I am thrilled to welcome Tom Parrish to Berkeley Rep. His decades of service in the American theatre, combined with his deep commitment to ensuring that arts organizations reach beyond their walls to be vital, engaged members of their communities, make Tom a perfect choice to help lead Berkeley Rep's next era. I'm looking forward to working with Tom to build on the extraordinary foundation that Susie and Tony created, and envision the next phase of this beloved company."

As Berkeley Rep continues to look toward the future, the company remains devoted to championing the spirit of innovation that is essential to the creation of art and the development of artists, and to helping to build a critical-minded, engaged, and empathetic citizenry through thought-provoking productions and exceptional arts education opportunities.

Thank you again for your generous support of the Berkeley Rep. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact grantsmanager@berkeleyrep.org.